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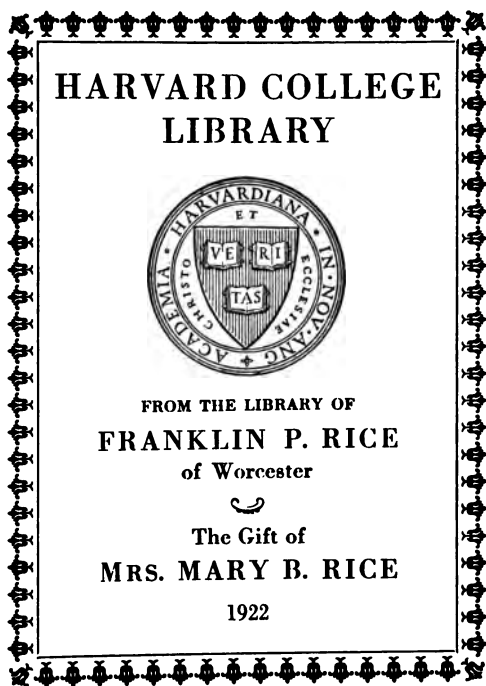
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PERSONAL NARRATIVE
Fourth Series, No. 16.

IN A REBEL PRISON:
Or, Experiences in Danville, Va.

BY ALFRED S. ROE,
Late Private, Co. A, Ninth New York Heavy Artillery Volunteer



PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
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IN A REBEL PRISON:

OR,

EXPERIENCES IN DANVILLE, VA.

"WHEN I was in prison!" How many people I have seen shrink away from me on my uttering this expression; but the appendix, "Rebel prison," invariably draws from them the words, "What! were you in a Rebel prison? In what prison, and how long? How did they use you?"

From intense aversion, the expression has changed to one of the utmost interest, and there are indications of awakening sympathy when I reply, "Yes, in Danville, Va. Between seven and eight months, and as well as they could; but their best was bad enough." The men, captured at Monocacy, Md., by foot and rail, have finally reached the most considerable place in southern Virginia, and on the morn of July 29th, 1864, the heavy prison door

opens and shuts upon our party. I have always rated the total number entering the building at about six hundred. Of these prisoners, one hundred and six were members of my regiment. On the 19th of the following February, when we parted from our prison house, I was one of forty-five "Ninth" men who joyfully set their faces northward. It does not follow that the difference in numbers represented deaths in Danville, for there had been two exchanges of sick ; but more than one-quarter of our "boys" were left in Virginian graves. Just twenty-seven out of our one hundred and six succumbed to prison hardships, and in dying found their release. Of those sent northward in August and October, many were stopped at Richmond, and in "Libby," or on Belle Isle, found the fate escaped in Danville. Others, reaching the Federal lines, barely had strength to greet their friends, and then they, too, ceased from earth. It is a very moderate estimate to claim that fully one-half our number fell victims, in less than a year, to the results of our imprisonment. Then, too, any prisoner who had passed beyond the period of boyhood never fully recovered

from his months of hunger, cold, and anxiety. When, at the end of the following April, I rejoined my regiment and a comrade undertook to tell me how much I had escaped through my capture, I quite silenced him by asking if any company had lost more than half its men during my absence; if the Valley campaign, hard though it was, had resulted in the death of one-quarter of the members of the regiment. In the National Cemetery, at Winchester, thirty-eight comrades from the Ninth are sleeping; but they are the dead from Opequan, Fisher's Hill, and Cedar Creek, with those who died from disease during the fall. I make this comparison solely to show the extreme mortality among men in a condition of unnatural confinement with scant sustenance.

As to our location, we were in a brick building, erected some years before for tobacco manufacturing purposes, but which had been pressed into the service of the Confederate government for prison use; and I have since been informed by the owner he never got a cent for it. In the list of prison houses in Danville, it is No. 1. Just back of us, on the bank of a mill-race, is the cook-house, where Yan-

kee workmen mix up and bake strange combinations, called corn bread. My mother still preserves some of this bread as a Rebellion relic after more than a quarter of a century. I think it is as good now as it ever was. A small piece, shown by me on the Northern Central Railroad of Pennsylvania, on my way home, having a furlough, was provocative of great profanity. One man in particular wondering if any blanked government expected God to help it when it gave such blanked stuff as that to white men. I think my returning the obnoxious article to my haversack and thereby ridding him of the sight, alone saved him from an apoplectic fit. Across the mill-race and between that and the River Dan was the foundry of Mr. Holland, where many weak-kneed and empty-stomached prisoners worked for a trifle more than what they could get to eat. Further along rolled the river itself, a stream notable in history as that whose upper waters had stayed the course of Cornwallis when pursuing Greene, and which, before it reached the sea, was broadened into the Roanoke. Here it is wide, but shallow, and its waters, clear or muddy, according to the season, are

to furnish us liquid for drinking. Beyond it, the land rises into a high hill, topped towards the west with trees, but immediately opposite, open, and betraying, wherever the surface is broken, the peculiar red earth characteristic of Virginia and North Carolina, for fully two hundred miles from north to south. It is surmounted by a substantial brick mansion, that of the famous Claiborne family, and the view rests the eye that looks out from a room crowded with woe and wretchedness. Save this building and a few structures along the river's edge, there is nothing to note towards the north.

When we can get a squint from the west windows without the sight of the vigilant guard, we may see a large wooden edifice known by us as No. 2. Here, are the Confederate prison headquarters, and here, too, are the few men detailed from the prisoners to do various things for us. For instance, Negus, of Company B, makes splint brooms to be used in sweeping the prison floors, and Aaron Hall, of Company A, finds plenty to do in painting the names of the dead upon the head-boards provided by the rebels. These men convey to their friends many

articles of food that serve to mitigate the horrors of the place. A passage way separates Nos. 1 and 2. Going along to the south, on the corner of Main street, is No. 3. This is the place where the officers are quartered, save upon the upper floor, where are the colored prisoners, taken at the Mine explosion. It was said that these negroes were placed here as an especial affront to the officers, the Confederates thinking to thus heap indignity upon the Federals on account of our employment of black soldiers. However, I never heard that any one felt particularly troubled over their presence.

Turning to the east we encounter No. 4, just facing our No. 1. So here we have these four buildings on the three sides of a square, making a convenient place for the guards to parade and occasionally to drill a little. Here, too, they sometimes punished those of their soldiers who had tarried too long with the seductive apple-jack, and a "Johnny" on a barrel, or in it, was not an uncommon sight. In other portions of the city were prisons Nos. 5 and 6, and also the hospital.

No. 1 is three stories high with an attic. Our en-

trance is made into an entry which runs the width of the building on the west end. It may be eight feet wide. Opposite the outside door is a flight of stairs leading upward. In this entry, a guard with a gun keeps constant watch. Midway of its length is a doorway leading into the first floor. Here are placed the wounded men who have been brought with us, and those who soon may have to go to the hospital. Here, too, the prisoners lay their dead, who die before they can be taken to the latter place, and we learn to hasten down in the morn to see if any of the newly placed dead are friends of ours. In this room, also, a guard is stationed. At the east end of the building a door opens into the yard, an enclosure having a length of possibly one hundred feet, and a width of twenty. At any rate, its length is the combined width of the prison and the cook-house, with the narrow passage between. In the northeast corner is a sink, and about this yard another guard constantly walks. In it only a small number of men are allowed at night, and in the day time any disposition to unduly crowd it is resented by the guard, and "You Yanks" have to make tracks for the inte-

rior. On one side is a large trough, said to have been filled with clean water once ; but this must have been before our day. I early convinced myself that I was cleaner by keeping my hands out of its contents than I was by using them. Yet I remember one man, a foreigner, who had the hydropathic craze, at least I thought he had, who, every morning, immersed himself therein, having, in December, frequently to break the ice to get at the mud. I don't know that it was bathing that killed him, but I do know that he died. Over against the building we are permitted to make small fires of little sticks of kindling, bought from the guards, and by this means we sometimes make crust coffee and cook such delicacies as beef's eyes and lights. Sometimes a rat is caught, and those initiated claim that he made excellent soup. I don't know. Through the cracks in the fence, looking out into the passage between the prison and cook-house, such converse as we have with friends outside may be had. Perhaps our friend has made us a cake of sifted meal, with a fair amount of salt in it, with just the least suspicion of grease added. If so, he will watch his

chance and toss it over the ten foot fence, or perchance he may secure the privilege of entering the building on some pretext, when his quondam tent-mate and comrade will not be exactly a bloated bondholder, but for a brief time he will make his stomach the holder of a wonderfully satisfying morsel. In the heated days of summer and early fall this yard is much sought by the men, and, walking, talking, or seated upon the ground, its area is pretty well occupied. Here it is that one day I find Alonzo F——, of Company H, lying with closed eyes, his face and hands covered with flies. "Why don't you brush off the flies," I say to him, fairly quivering myself over the sight. "Oh! what's the use! They'll come again," is the drawled out response. Such a want of ambition could not long survive, and very soon the sod closing over him shut out his tormentors.

Let us now go up-stairs. It is possible that under them we may find a pious Catholic telling his beads and zealously saying his prayers, continuing his devotions in the face of constant chaffing, for the prisoners are not over religious. Poor fellow! His

prayers did not avail so far as release from thralldom was concerned. His oratory was, ere long, vacant, and its occupant went before Him to whom his orisons had so long ascended. Up the dark stairway we climb and come upon the second floor. It covers the entire space with no break save sustaining posts. Here, with others, the fifty-three members of the One Hundred and Sixth New York stay, and one of their men, Sergeant Pritchard, is a sort of director for the whole building. He is a good, fair man, and every prisoner recalls him with pleasure. About two hundred men are quartered in this story. Another flight of stairs takes us to the third floor, where the most of the men of the "Ninth" lie. Again there is an unbroken view of the entire room, and under the second window from the west on the south side I throw down my baggage and with my comrades rest. Between me and the stairs leading to the attic are half a dozen men, mostly from the Ninth, though my immediate neighbor is George Turner, from a New York cavalry regiment. Should we care to climb the remaining flight, we shall find, just under the roof, a poorly lighted and

exceedingly warm place, crowded with humanity. In winter it is correspondingly cold.

It does not take us a great while to recover from the fatigue incident to our long journey. Then begins a protracted hunger, to last till we see our own lines again. During the months of August and September we are given corn bread and occasionally a soup made of refuse bits of bacon, sometimes of fresh meat—including lights or lungs. The bacon is rancid, and the vegetables in it are not very inviting, consisting of stray cabbage leaves and a leguminous article known by us as "cow pea." The well-worn statement that every pea has a worm in it had no exception here. In fact we thought it had a double verification, but poor as this soup was there came a time when we would have joyously hailed its advent. The bread, mentioned before, was composed of corn and cob ground together, and was baked in large tins—the whole upper surface being marked off into rectangles, so that when carried to the floor for distribution, by a knife in the hands of the designated party, it is cut into parallelpipeds of about two-thirds the size of an ordinary brick. To each man

one of these is given, and on it he may sustain nature till the next morning. If he tries to save any of it for a meal, later in the day, unless he puts it into his pocket, the chances are that it will be stolen, so really the safest plan for him is to eat it at once and then solace himself on recollection and expectation till the next meal.

From one day let us learn all. It is, we will surmise, the middle of September. Morning comes early to those who have no evenings, and the first streakings of dawn have brought us from our recumbent positions. Conversation begins. We go over the old story of possible exchange, and perhaps wonder what the folks at home are doing. At the worst we know that we are twenty-four hours nearer release than we were the day before. The day advances ; but eating is yet a long way off. Anon, men begin to take off garment after garment and submit it to very close scrutiny. What are they after? Why is it that nearly all, as they talk, keep up a constant motion slapping now one part of the person and then another? Now a hand is thrust up a sleeve and something is found what affords the fin-

der a deal of satisfaction. Then a quick grab is made for something upon the neck and more satisfaction. Never letting the talk halt for a moment, one may turn down his stocking or turn up his trousers' leg and grim determination marks his movement as he applies his two thumb nails and by a sort of quartz crushing motion produces an easily recognized cracking sound. The individual who is going through his garment regularly and carefully, in army parlance, is "skirmishing." It is the *Pediculus Humanus Corporis* that is occasioning all this activity. This parasite is an invariable accompaniment in army life; but in prison he reaches his highest pinnacle of importance. The carelessness of some makes the careful suffer, and to be entirely free from him is impossible. Occasionally, indignation causes the men to take extreme measures with the offender, and I remember that C——d's blouse was taken from him and thrown into the sink. A finger could not be laid on it and not touch some living, moving object. The owner did not long survive the loss of his garment. The man who did not care for himself was doomed. The fecundity of the

insect was marvelous, and, if later in the season, the cold prevented a search for two or three days, one's condition became nearly unendurable. Certain boys anxious to know the time necessary for incubation, experimented and ascertained; but unfortunately for the interests of science I was too hungry to make notes and the results have escaped me.

The first duty of the morning is roll call—not that any one cares for our names, or ever calls them, but we give this appellation to the act of falling into line and being counted by a rebel functionary, who comes in every morning. We are ordered into place by one of our number that we may be ready for the officer who simply counts our squad that he may account for all. It is easy to deceive him, and in the only instance of escape from our prison, men were lifted up through the floor at the east end to make good the places of those who had taken French leave. They had already been counted below, and, though the squads were numbered rapidly, they had time to get up, and to fall in, thus covering the departure of the escaped. It took a long time and much searching before the deceit was discovered.

Several times when thus drawn up, we were searched for valuables, the rebels, somehow or other, thinking that the Yanks had many greenbacks about them. Strange places of concealment were had. One man put his money well down in his bushy head of hair. Another had sewed his into the binding of his pantaloons, and "Old P——s" kept his in his mouth. Knowing this, I said to him: "Where did you put your money when the rebs searched us?" In a tone, several degrees softer than butter, the old fellow replied, "Money, money—I have no money." "Why, yes you have, too! What's the use of lying about it? You know you had it back in that mouth of yours!" Now he lays his hand upon my arm and gently beseeches me to talk a little lower, lest the guard might hear me!

Roll call over, we may hug ourselves till meal time, trying thus to pinch our stomachs into a cessation from craving. It is, however, always in vain—and when at 9.30 or 10 o'clock A. M. we hear the entrance of the bread bringers we are in a condition seemingly bordering on starvation. The slab, belonging to our squad, is slammed down upon the

floor. The table has no cloth, there are no knives and forks, no napkins and no grace. Very speedily the dinner is made, and with wolfish eagerness we devour the portion allotted to us. The crumbs, resulting from the cutting are scraped up with the utmost care, and I have seen men fight for them till they were too weak to continue the contest longer. Two men who thus fought, one from the One Hundred and Fifty-first New York, the other a Jerseyman, and who, in their snarling fierceness reminded me of starving dogs, were, in a few brief weeks sleeping quietly enough side by side in the burial ground. With us it was not *Auri Sacra fames*; but rather food, food, food. Hunger, being the best of sauces, the bread, coarse though it was, was very sweet to our palates, and unless the system rebelled, as it did in some cases, life could be maintained upon it, at least for a time. Occasionally our hosts' supply of salt seemed to be very short, whereupon the bread was quite tasteless, and then one of the chief objects of traffic among us was the same saline matter.

Breakfast, dinner or whatever the meal may be


called, being over, we have absolutely nothing to do. We may, if we like, study our fellow captives, and what a set they are. Here are men who first saw the light in almost every state of Europe. Wandering westward, they have been tumbled into the seething cauldron, called America, and, presto, they are transformed into Yankees. The day is very hot, and clothing is voted a nuisance. Item after item is cast aside, till nothing is retained save what decency requires, and decency, it will be remembered, is a relative term. Here comes a stalwart Yankee who first saw the light in Green Erin. His brogue is delightful, and he can tell you of many adventures when a sailor bold he ploughed the seas beneath the English flag. Upon his breast is the indelible figure of a vessel under full sail. In red and blue the picture is a tribute to the fortitude that enabled him to withstand the torture from the many thousand needle stings that worked those colors in. His brawny arms bear figures of dancing girls, and he is to us almost as good as a panorama. Here is a tall, finely formed Yankee, whose voice betrays his English birth. What is the history of the letter D, so

deeply stamped into his left breast? Many times my tongue was on the point of asking, but I forbore, fearing I might learn that it stood for "deserter," and I didn't want to think of him in that light. But Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" was not more conspicuous than this terrible blue D, which could be readily seen across the room. The anatomist and physiologist may here study the human form once divine but under the pinching prison regimen fast becoming anything but beautiful.

From this cursory glance let us walk about our prison, being careful not to go too near the windows lest some vigilant guard, anxious to show his zeal, shoot at us. I say "shoot at," for the failure to hit many of us was apparently through no lack of intention on their part, but was the direct result of poor markmanship. On the west side we may stop at the workshop of a Teutonic Yankee named Clip-pard and him we shall find diligently engaged in making chess-men, orders for which he has from the guards far beyond his ability to fill, let him labor never so faithfully. He works these exquisite figures out of bone by means of simple tools in the

main provided by himself. I wonder if he be not allied to those Swiss, who for so many generations have excelled in toy making? His pay is in Confederate money; but by it he is enabled to supply many a luxury for himself and for his associates.

As we reach the north side and glance at the beautiful river, and the waving trees beyond, our attention is drawn to a sad sight at our feet. Here, bucked and gagged is a prisoner — and what is his offense? None that he is conscious of. His reason has fled, and, alternately praying and imprecating, he is fast wearing away. I shudder now, as I recall the fervor of that prayer calling on God for help and anon, with fierce curses, damning every object that recurred to his “heat oppressed brain.” Just a few days more and he, from earthly sorrows free, will be lying beneath the soil. He is a Company C man of my regiment, and was too old for military service when he enlisted. Here lies a cavalryman from Oswego, N. Y., who avers that he would give a month’s wages for a pint of gin and an equal amount for a pouch full of tobacco. But he gets neither, for he hasn’t his wages by him. Just beyond, at that



northeast window, sits an industrious man. His name is Reed, and he comes from that grand Green Mountain state, a member of the Tenth Regiment. He was never a large man, and prison life surely is not conducive to growth. Day after day he has toiled by that window. Bone ornaments of remarkable beauty come from his deft touch, and Confederate money in abundance comes into his possession. He, too, is far behind his orders. The young rebel guards have commissioned him to make sleeve buttons and collar pins for their lady loves, while charms and pendants, innumerable, are fashioned by him. But with the advance of time, his cheeks pale and his step grows unsteady. Finally, weak and poor, he is taken to the hospital, where I lose track of him.

Ah! what have we here! A party of men are hilarious about something. In the centre of the group are four men playing poker. They have the only pack of cards in the prison. Soiled hands have used them till they are in truth of mother earth, and from the usual rectangular form they have been worn to a uniform oval. The pack belongs to boys


on the lower floor, and these men are using them through having given to the possessors some part of their rations of bread. Every looker-on is getting enjoyment from the game, watching most intently its progress. It is safe to say that the jack-pot is not very full.

A man reading ! Surely, there are no books here ! Yes, just three — one volume of the Life of Charlotte Brontë, the Life of Edward Payson and certain lectures of Lola Montez. These may be hired of the owner for a small morsel of bread. I am afraid the dancer found more readers than the Portland divine.

As we turn the southwest corner of the floor, we may find a Yankee soldier, born in France, who is turning many an honest penny in the shape of extra bread, through his power to tattoo the prisoners with India ink. He has inflicted no little torture on many a boy who will carry the marks to his grave. But our Frenchy has a peculiar habit. One that I would not credit, till I watched him and actually saw him eat the vermin caught upon his blanket.

Leaning against the wall, as we advance, is a party of men, the most prominent of whom is First

Sergeant Andrew Bixby, of Company H. An animated discussion is in progress, and we are greeted with, "Well, I'm blanked glad you are here. We have been trying to decide how to make a mince pie. Can you tell us?" Sundry watchings of mother, years before, now stand me in hand, and I am able to satisfy inquiring minds if not hungry stomachs. This is a queer party before me. The sergeant is one of the best men in the world, but he will swear. There is nothing north or south that is not an object of his maledictions, yet he means nothing by it. It is a silly habit he has, but one, alas, that sticks to him, and weeks afterward, like Buchanan's starling, he dies swearing. Here is Jimmy Smith, one of the best natured Irishman living. With what a rich brogue would he roll out the dulcet strains of "A Frog, he would a wooing go." His "Kamer-Kimer Keemer-ko," for delicious trilling of the r, was never surpassed. If there was ever a moment in his life when he wasn't ready to laugh and sing, it must have been when I didn't see him. By his side is another Smith, an Englishman, "'Arry," he called himself. He openly proclaims that he doesn't care



a d—n which side whips. He was a soldier in the Crimean War, and is a soldier of fortune. He has cast in his lot with the North ; but he says when his term is out, he is bound to serve that faithfully, he will, if possible, go into the Southern army, for he wants to see both sides. He is a good soldier, but repeated references to a favorite potation of his has secured from us the name of “ Old ’Aff and ’Aff.” He hasn’t the slightest appreciation of humor, and my statement that an irate parent would name two cities of France to a rejected suitor for his daughter’s hand, saying “ U-shant Havre,” is greeted by him with supreme disdain, he shouting that the word is pronounced “ Us-hant.”

We have been around the room, and be the time long or short, we have nothing to do but wait for night. As the darkness steals over us we seek our places, and on the bare floors stretch ourselves. In the warm weather, with open windows and the air gently blowing through, the temptation to amusement is strong, and I have heard every creature on the earth imitated with more or less success. Before the animation of our former liberty had quite left us

there was often singing; but as the days grew shorter, the nights longer and colder, there was very little of sportive nature in the hours. Night meant an absence of sunlight, and consequently more misery. We lay as close to each other as possible, those within, of course, warmer than those on the outside. The end places we took in turns. When one turned over, all must do so. George Turner's body was more sensitive to the touch of vermin than any I ever saw. I have known him to leap up from his place and dance around as some men would, if stung by a bee, and this he would continue till the cause of his affliction was found and destroyed. Of snoring we have all sorts and sizes, and it is no uncommon thing to have the aggressor jerked out of his place and his slumbers by those whom he has disturbed.

Sometimes on the still air are borne sounds that leave a fadeless impression. From the first floor, came, once, strains of harmony, so sweet that I thought myself in Heaven, and that angel voices were making true the fancies of my childhood. Only the wounded men, sweet singers they were,

beguiling the long tedium of night with song, and it was that delightful ditty, "Kitty Wells," that for the first time in my life fell on my ears. For several days delirium had possessed the brain of a young boy from Ohio, who was just beneath us. During the day, the hum of conversation drowned his voice; but when sleep had pressed down nearly all the eyelids, then it was that his plaintive tones came to us, and how he pleaded for mother! Ineffectual tears filled our eyes at the sound of his cries; but with him we wandered amid the scenes of his earlier years, and we saw that mother leading him by the hand, and we saw her bidding her darling "Good-bye" as he became a soldier, and we reflected how little that Ohio mother knew of the sufferings of her dying boy. His spirit, ere long, forsook the frail tenement and was at rest.

So then, day and night, and night and day, we stayed on. Hope which springs eternal in the heart of youth buoyed us up. Scarcely a day passed but there came a rumor of an immediate exchange. There was little variety save as we


watched the diminution in our numbers. Occasionally, in the dead of the night, there would arise a terrible commotion and cries of "Stop thief!" and "Raiders!" would be heard. Some predatory scamps, knowing that certain ones had some sort of valuable, would steal upon the victim, and, by a concerted movement, would seize upon and carry off the article. Before any search could be instituted the robbers would have fallen into their places among their friends, and no loss was ever made good. The bag or receptacle would generally be found in the yard in the morning. At intervals, as the hours advanced, the guards would cry the time thus: "Ten o'clock, Post No. 8, and all's w-e-l-l," drawling this out in a thinness of tone possible only to those whose speech generations of tobacco salivation has diluted. One night we heard the guard in the square shout, "Take your hand in, Yank, or I shoot." I must do the rebel credit for repeating his warning, and then came the shot, followed by most derisive laughter from the prison. Some one, to try the fellow, had hung a cloth from the upper sash, and, to the guard's eye, it looked

like a man swinging his arm, and his orders were to keep the men away from the window.

The only escapes from our prison were effected by two men, one a member of the Second Massachusetts Cavalry, though he was a Californian, who let themselves down into the sink, wrenched off the grate leading into the narrow sewer, and, at the imminent peril of suffocation, through indescribable filth, made their way out to the river and eventual liberty.

In the month of December, one bright morning, the 16th, those of us who were looking from the window saw the guards thrown into a state of great excitement. Their guns had been stacked in the plaza before us; but now, seizing them, they rushed with speed to the officers' prison, and, thrusting their weapons through the windows, fired. All this was an enigma to us, and it was not till sometime afterward that we learned that a plan had been formed to seize the guards in the prison, rush to the square, appropriate the guns, free the prisoners, arm them from the neighboring arsenal, and march away to freedom.

"But the best laid plans of mice and men,
Gang aft aglae."



Some of the officers had voted the scheme hair-brained, though they went into it rather than have the name of standing out. Your Rhode Island Frenchman, General Duffié, was the chief promoter of the affair, and it is possible that they might have gotten out of the building had not the very anxiety of the prisoners to get down the stairs occasioned so much noise that the outside door, opened to their call, was speedily closed and the death-dealing volley followed. Colonel Raulston, of the Twenty-fourth New York Cavalry, who had deemed the plan suicidal, was killed, and several were wounded. Of those men who thus, twenty-five years ago, made a break for liberty, probably not a third are living to-day.

Men who had gone out to work on the rebel fortifications from No. 6 made good their escape, at least for a few days. Some succeeded in getting to our lines, more were recaptured. Let it be said to the credit of No. 1 that, to my knowledge, only one man was found who was willing to sell his services to his enemies. He took the oath of allegiance and remained there when we came away. It was a

daily sight to see the colored prisoners driven to and from No. 3, there to dig upon the fortifications. Neighboring planters could secure any one of these men by simply claiming them. They were beaten and starved till scarcely any were left. One man was sent to Richmond as a cook and he came away from that place with us. He told me that, so far as he knew, he was the only survivor of the Mine captives to be sent North.

December 20th, in spite of a drizzling rain, I remained in the yard till I was quite wet. This was at nightfall. By eight o'clock I was down with an attack of diphtheria. All through the night I had great difficulty in breathing. The next day I grew worse, but there was nothing to be done for me. The 22d, in the morning, with several others, I was trundled off to the hospital in a condition which, I have always thought, arising at home, would have finished me. There was no debilitating sympathy around me, and I had no relish for a grave in Virginia, sacred though its soil be. I was in no condition to appreciate the view of the streets, though I remember passing No. 6, and we are finally landed

at the hospital. Here I am assigned to a cot, and the German steward proudly refers to me as the first case of diphtheria, and so far as I know I am the only case during our imprisonment. In a few days my disease yields to lunar caustic and flax-seed poultices, and I then have a chance to look about me. The doctor makes his rounds and asks me, "Well, how ye comin' on to-day?" He is a kind man and I respect him. Dr. Dame, the Episcopal rector, New Hampshire born, and a second cousin of Caleb Cushing, calls almost daily on us, and, on his asking me what he can do for me, I suggest a book. The next coming brings *Paradise Lost*—there being a degree of fitness in his selection that I don't believe occurred to him. In December last I called on the aged clergyman and said to him, grasping his hand, "You don't know me; but I was sick and in prison and ye visited me." With what cordiality came the response, "Is that so? I am glad to see you. Come, let us sit and talk." For nearly an hour, we discourse of these remote times, and he tells that wherever it was possible he sent a letter to the friends of the dead prisoners. Whatever of

improvement there was in our treatment above that given to men further South, I think was largely owing to him. To my mind he filled, in the broadest sense, the definition of the Christian. Though Northern born, his early going to the South, his education at Hampden-Sidney, his marriage and long residence in Virginia, all combined to make his prejudices in favor of secession; but he was more than rebel or federal, he was a Christian man. Going into one of the prisons one Sunday to preach he found a second cousin, by the name of Cushing, from the old Bay State, and he led the singing. So thoroughly did the war mix up families. His talks to the men were always most respectfully received, and when in the following April, the Sixth corps entered Danville, no one received more considerate attention than the Rev. George W. Dame.

As I convalesced I explored. I found that our hospital was built for Confederate occupancy; but necessity had filled it with Yankees. So far as I could observe, we received as good as our captors had to give. A good lady living near, whose name I never learned, daily sent to us some sort of deli-

cacy, and that was honestly given to us. The two Confederate officers who were about our ward held converse as to the approaching Christmas, and great expectations were had over a visit to the home of one of them. The principal present to be taken was a pair of shoes, made by one of our men, to be given to a sister. The poverty of the country was apparent in the most commonplace conversation. On their return from their festival they dilated on the pleasure afforded by that one pair of Yankee-made shoes. The next May I met one of these lieutenants at Boston Station, on the Richmond and Danville Railroad, the same being near his home, and I recall his wonder at my rehearsal of his pre and post Christmas talks.

When, one morning, one of the men said, "That fellow out at the dead-house had scales like an alligator," I was moved with a desire to see that place. At the earliest possible moment I made my way there, and daily thereafter I made morning visits to see who had been brought out during the night or in the early morn. I frequently helped the negro driver to lift the dead into the boxes, there being

for me a morbid attraction for the place wholly unaccountable. As a rule the bodies were not molested, though on one occasion wandering swine sadly disfigured several. Once, at least, a seeming corpse was carried out before it was really thus, and, revived by the clear air, Jimmy O—ds arose and, naked, marched into the ward proclaiming himself "not dead yet by a d—d sight." Weeks afterward I saw the same Jimmy peacefully smoking his dudeen in Annapolis. My rambles are of course, confined to the bounds of the hospital inclosure; but with returning strength came a revived appetite, one that my rations by no means satisfied. I refrain from telling the straits to which I was forced in my researches about the cook-house, and the quantity and quality of alleged food that I secured. My mine was the foundation of a little plan to run away with a western soldier, though he came from Ireland before he went west, but before we could get our stock in provisions we were sent back to the prison.

In my liberty or freedom of the wards, I went through them all, in search of certain trinkets or keepsakes left by friends of mine, and to see some

of the living who were unable to leave their cots. The little reticule containing peach pit dishes made by David Wilson for his sisters, I found and later sent to his family. I stood by the side of Corporal Meade, of my company, and as I saw his giant form dwindled to nothing but bones, barely covered with skin, I forgave him his crowding me out of the place I had made for myself one night down on the Weldon railroad, and I devoutly wished him a safe passage on the journey he must so soon make.

“Kitty Baker! Why don’t you come, Kitty Baker,” is the sad monologue that all one night may be heard throughout the ward. I did not know the dying man; but imagination pictured scenes in a far-away land, where, perhaps, some one anxiously awaited a coming that could never be.

Frank Gustin had lived in the same town as myself, and I promised him, if I survived, to carry a lock of his hair to his aunt. During that last night of his life, his labored breathing proclaimed the approaching end. The lock that I cut from his brow was carried to the relative who had not known his whereabouts, he having run away to enlist.

I would omit the following scene did I not wish to reveal as fully as possible the secrets of my prison-house. Says Steward Small one day, "If you men want to see a sight you never saw equalled just come out here to the corner." We went; seated in a chair was a man whom I had often noted as wearing a close-fitting skull cap, which I had never seen removed. It was now off and vermin covered his head in a way I had never dreamed of. The steward, with a pair of scissors, clipped off the locks, of a warm red hue, and as they touched the ground they seemed to have a jelly like consistency. The hair off, a comb was drawn down his cranium, each draught rolling up a wad of squirming life as large as one's finger. The back of the head was like a mass of raw beef. We were close to the path along which all those must go who went for water, for just below us was a fine spring. These men were no novices in prison sights; but here was something that astonished them. Stopping they, in turn, called on all the names of the Deity, and also those of the denizens of Inferno. The poor victim seemed absolutely without feeling. The sequel is sad; for,

bereft of his hair, like Sampson, his strength failed and death soon followed. What was strangest in the whole affair was the fact that no one remembered seeing him scratch his head, and it was only Steward Small's discovery of the vermin crawling from beneath his cap that led to the investigation. I reasoned that his whole scalp was paralyzed or benumbed.

My stay at the hospital is one month long, and then I am marched, with others, back to my old quarters, or as near them as I can get. Rumors of exchange grow more common. It begins to look as though the Confederates would relent and allow that a black man may be a soldier. After the coldest weather is over, clothing that had been sent into the Confederacy early in the season is passed down to us. It is distributed, but so hungry are we that we very readily trade it with the rebels for something to eat, and in a few brief hours we are as ragged as ever. Every movement on the part of our guards seems to indicate that a change is near. By and by comes the statement that to-morrow we go. To be sure the morrow is again and again removed, but

that we shall get out is evident. In our joy over prospective release we do not forget the poor boys who sorrowed with us, but whom we must leave behind us. Sergeant York, of Company D,—how he walked the floor, day after day, exclaiming that he must live to get home to see his wife and baby. But even his will cannot keep him up. Lee Marcellus, with his good-natured face, comes to mind, but he must stay. Tom Roe, of Company C, as clean an Irish boy as ever crossed the ocean, cannot go home with us.

We all remember Sterne's "Sentimental Journey," and that at the hotel in Paris he encountered the Starling in his cage, whose sole refrain was, "I can't get out." Here is the secret of the horror of prison life. Over and above the privations of hunger and thirst, more biting than cold or heat, is the ever present thought, "I can't get out." When, finally, on the 19th of February, we were actually marched out of our prison, there was no prisoner of Chillon sigh upon my lips nor in my heart. It was not yet the air of liberty that we were breathing; but the prison was behind and we were out.

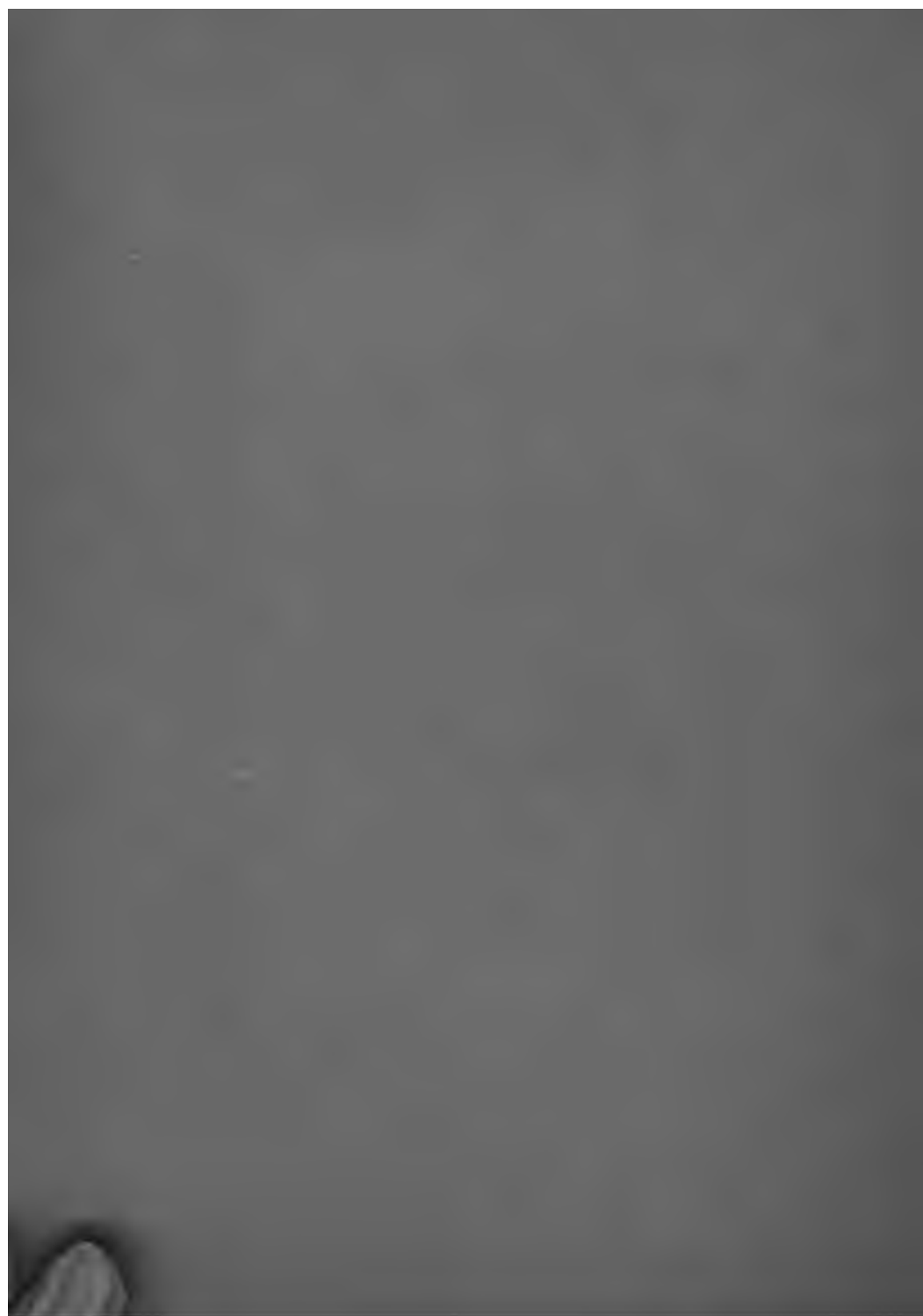
Down to the station which we first saw, six months before we march and here are freight cars in waiting. Sixty-five of us are crowded into one car and we proclaim it full ; but fifteen more men are jammed in. So then, here we are—eighty men, or boys—too crowded for lying or even sitting. Must we stand all the way to Richmond? It looks like it ; but we are willing to endure that and more even if by so doing we may put distance between ourselves and Danville.



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